Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.7 No.2 June, 2024; p.g. 291 – 301; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

WORSHIPPING OF A SOVEREIGN GOD: CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The major purposes of this study are to find out the common grounds of Muslims and Christians on the conceptual nature of God, establish if there are differences between Christianity and Islam with respect to ethics and morality, find out the general perceptions of Muslims and Christians concerning approaches to worshipping God and draw a logical conclusion on the question of whether Christians and Muslims are worshiping the same God. Hence, the study adopted a descriptive research design in which structured questionnaire based on the specific objectives of the study was used to elicit responses from selected respondents. The population of the study comprised all Christians and Muslims (comprising of congregation members, Priests, Pastors, Imam, Clerics and other religion leaders) in 10 churches and 10 mosques across three L.G.A of Lagos State (Yaba, Mushin and Lagos Mainland). Using three (3) different denomination/congregations/groups from both faiths, stratified random sampling technique was used to select 450 samples for the study. Using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Statistics, the reliability coefficient (r) of the questionnaire was found to be 0.91 which signal the fact that the instrument was reliable and good for the study. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze all the research questions such that any questionnaire item with mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as agreed while any questionnaire item with mean less than 2.50 was regarded as disagreed. The findings showed that Christianity and Islam have important meeting points in their understanding of God but certain areas of misconceptions like Trinity, divinity of Jesus, Jesus as son of God and Crucifixion of Jesus still exist. Among the recommendations proffered is that since God is immeasurable, no religious group should claim to be better in knowing God better than the other. Hence, the question of whether Christians and Muslims worship same God is totally needless.

Keywords: Worship, Sovereign God, Christianity, Islam, Religion.

Introduction

The concept of religion and God is one that has many meeting points and several controversies as there are many worshipers and believers with varying perceptions and beliefs. In Nigeria,

there are three major categories of believers in God, the Christians, the Muslims and the African Traditional Religion practitioners. These three groups of believers have different perspectives of God as well as certain similarities. However, in order to better understand the concept of God irrespective of groups, certain philosophical considerations will be helpful. Both Christianity and Islam have a well developed concept of God as both agree that for God to be the greatest imaginable being worthy of worship, he must be a being who maximizes all possible qualities such as Power, knowledge, Goodness and Exist eternally. Philosophically, Luhman (2007); Armstrong (1994) and Marshall (2004) believe that God is an Omnipresent Spirit, creator of all things, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal and a perfect being. Hence, irrespective of methods or modes of worship, both Christianity and Islam should have a meeting point on each of the above philosophical views of God.

One controversial question of whether the Christians and the Muslims worship and believe in same God has continued to polarize religion in Nigeria. The answer to this question is definitely not as simple as many may think. According to Reynolds (2020) a good place to start the investigation of whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God is with the Arabic Word "Allah". While Allah is the word Muslims use for God, Arabic speaking Christians also uses Allah in their Bible translation to refer to God. In Arabic, Allah is the word formed from the noun "god" (ilah) and the attached definite article (al). Thus, Allah could be translated into English as "the God". Since Islam and Christianity share the idea that there is only one God, it is appropriate to share the word Allah to describe the one who is responsible for creating the Universe as this shared idea provides some common conceptual ground in both faiths. Reynoids (2020) thus believe that a more helpful question in the argument might be "Who is Allah to Muslims and Christians? In analyzing the question further, Ibrahim (2014) believe that the argument is usually coloured by the preferences, presuppositions or theological-doctrinal understanding of the individual attempting to answer the question.

Some Christian scholars affirm that Muslims and Christians worship the same God while others take a different approach. For instance, a Christian scholar named Dudley Woodberry argues that: "in comparing Muslims and Christians beliefs, it is helpful to distinguish between the Being to whom we refer and what we understand about the character and actions of that Being in the two faiths" A Methodist theologian name Wesley Ariarajah believes that this question of whether the Muslims and the Christians worship same God cannot really be treated as "Yes or No" question, as there are areas of serious contradictions such as the notion of Triune God and notion of Jesus as God upheld by the Christians.

To gain a better insight into the argument of whether Christianity and Islam worship and believe in one God, it is ideal to have a clear understanding of the concepts of both religions. Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the world largest and most widespread religion with roughly 2.4 billion followers representing one-third of the global population (Religion Information Data, 2022). The adherents of Christianity known as Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God whose coming as the Messiah was prophesized in the Hebrew Bible called Old Testament (Jaroslav, 2022). The central tenet of Christianity is the belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah (Christ). Christians believe that Jesus as the Messiah was anointed by God as savior of humanity and hold that Jesus coming was the fulfillment of messianic prophecies of the Old Testament in the Bible.

Muslims are followers of Islam. They are monotheistic and worship one All-knowing God, who in Arabic is known as Allah, Followers of Islam aim to live a life of complete submission to Allah. They believe that nothing can happen without Allah's permission, but humans have free will. According to Juhansar (2011) Islam is Arabic word which means peace, submission and obedience. It also means acceptance and commitment to abide by the teachings and guidance of God. Islam's most fundamental concept is a strict monotheism called (tawhid), affirming that God is one. The basic creed of Islam is called (Shahada) recited under oath to enter the religion involves:

There are some major equilibrium points between Islam and Christianity religions. Christianity and Islam have links to Abraham who is revered and honored among Christians and Muslims alike. The two faiths share certain basic and fundamental aspects of belief, which further proves the link that they share with Prophet Abraham. Among such fundamentals are monotheism, teachings on ethics and morality, body of beliefs such as the belief in hell and paradise, mutual love and respect. However, Christianity and Islam differ in some aspects and to certain degrees. According to Fairchild (2017) and Afolabi (2015), these disagreements are usually products of differing theological interpretations or politics. Some of these frictions have generated a lot of controversies and could be the genesis of the question "Do Muslims and Christians worship same God"? Some of the areas of frictions include the notion of Triune God (i.e. the doctrine of Trinity) as believes by majority of Christians but opposed by Muslims, the interpretation and understanding of the Divinity of Jesus Christ**,** the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jesus' concept of "Son of God" and the doctrine of antichrist.

Statement of the Problem

Despite that Christianity and Islam are considered as Abrahamic and Monotheistic which suggests that both worship and believe in same God, a number of unresolved controversies still exist that could ignite further claim that both faiths do not really believe in and worship same God. Gardet & Jonier (2012) in their analysis submitted that Muslims usually view the Christians as people of the Book, and also regard them as Kafirs (unbelievers) committing Shirk (Polytheism) because of the doctrine of Trinity, and thus contend that Christians are dhimmis (religious taxpayers) under Sharia law. In the submission of Graig (2015) Christians similarly possess a wide range of views about Islam. The majority of Christians view Islam as a false religion due to the fact that its adherents reject the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ.

Religions all over the world have continued to create a lot of problems today. Ignorance of religion continued to compound these problems. Sulaiman (2016) asserts that the inability to recognize, respect and accommodate the religious views and opinions of others has been the major sources of religious violence in Nigeria as the adherents of the two faiths have demonstrated intolerant attitudes to result to violence. It is against these backdrops that the study on "worshipping of a Sovereign God: Christianity and Islam Perspectives" becomes imperative.

Purpose of the Study

This study is guided and driven by the following objectives:

1. To find out the common grounds of Muslims and Christians on the conceptual nature of God

2. To establish if there are differences between Christianity and Islam with respect to ethics and morality
3. To find out the general perceptions of Muslims and Christians concerning approaches to worshipping God
4. To draw a logical conclusion on the question of whether Christians and Muslims are worshiping the same God

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the common grounds of Muslims and Christians on the conceptual nature of God?
2. Are there differences between Christianity and Islam with respect to ethics and morality?
3. What is the general perception of Muslims and Christians concerning approaches to worshipping God?
4. Do Christians and Muslims really worship the same God?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design in which structured questionnaire designed based on the specific objectives of the study was used to elicit responses from selected respondents (Christians and Muslims). The population of the study comprised all Christians and Muslims (comprising of congregation members, priests, pastors, Imam, Clerics and other religion leaders) in 10 churches and 10 mosques across three L.G.A of Lagos State (Yaba, Mushin and Lagos Mainland). Three (3) different denomination/congregations/groups were considered in both faiths. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select 450 samples for the study. Table 1 below summarizes sample selection for the study.

Table 1: Sample selection for the study

S/N	L.G.A	Christians Churches	Samples	Muslim Movement	Samples	Total
1	Yaba	Catholics	25	Qadiriyya	25	
		Methodists	25	Tijaniyyah	25	
		R.C.C.G	25	Mouride	25	
2	Mushin	Catholics	25	Tijaniyyah	25	
		Methodists	25	Qadiriyya	25	
		R.C.C.G	25	Mouride	25	
3	Lagos Mainland	Catholics	25	Mouride	25	
		Methodists	25	Tijaniyyah	25	
		R.C.C.G	25	Qadiriyya	25	
	Total		**225**		**225**	**450**

Source; Field Work (2023)

The instrument was tilled "*Worshipping of a Sovereign God: Christianity and Islam Perspectives".* The Questionnaire was structured on a 4-point Likert scale options of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire was validated by experts

in the field of theology from both faiths (Christianity and Islam). Using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) Statistics, the reliability coefficient (r) of the questionnaire was found to be 0.91 which signal the fact that the instrument used for the study was reliable and good for the study. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze all the research questions. The decision rule for mean was 2.5 such that any questionnaire item with mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as agreed while any questionnaire item with mean less than 2.50 was regarded as disagreed.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Research Questions
Research Question 1:
What are the common grounds of Muslims and Christians on the conceptual nature of God?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Muslims and Christians on the conceptual nature of God

	Common grounds of Muslims and Christians on the conceptual nature of God	**Mean (X)**	**S.D**	**Remarks**
1	There is only one supreme supernatural God (Oneness of God)	3.32	0.52	Agree
2	God is All-powerful	3.20	0.51	Agree
3	God is present Everywhere	3.46	0.62	Agree
4	God Knows Everything	3.56	0.56	Agree
5	God is Sovereign	2.61	0.41	Agree
6	God is Holy	3.44	0.54	Agree
7	God is Absolute Truth	2.98	0.48	Agree
8	God is Just, Love and Merciful	3.27	0.52	Agree
9	God is Faithful	3.32	0.52	Agree
10	God Never Changes	3.20	0.51	Agree

Field Work (2023)

Data analysis in Table 2 showed the pattern of responses of the respondents (Muslims and Christians) on their knowledge concerning the conceptual nature of God. This pattern of responses indicated the common ground of both faiths in their belief of God. All the respondents generally obliged to the facts that God is an Omnipresent Spirit, the Creator of all things, responsible for the past, present and future existence of material objects and the laws that govern them, He is omnipotent and omniscient. They also both agreed that God is Eternal by nature rather than choice and that He is Perfect, Sovereign, Holy and Never Changes. The mean responses greater than 2.50 in all the questionnaire items indicated this position.

Research Question 2

Are there differences between Christianity and Islam with respect to ethics and morality?

Table 3: Mean Responses of Christians and Muslims with respect to ethics and morality

	Christianity and Islam with respect to ethics and morality	**Mean (X)**	**S.D**	**Remarks**
1	The Scripture (Bible) and the Holy Qur'an are the standard for ethics and morality in Christianity and Islam	3.15	0.50	Agree
2	Both Christianity and Islam condemn the sin of adultery and Abortion	3.67	0.49	Agree
3	Both Christianity and Islam condemn , murder and stealing	3.90	0.35	Agree
4	Both faiths teach that its adherent should be charitable, honest, just and have forgiving spirits	3.78	0.41	Agree
5	Islam and Christianity teach that ethically and morally, a believer must be kind, honorable and humble to one's parents	3.86	0,38	Agree
6	Both Christianity and Islam ethics posit that active voluntary euthanasia (the painless killing of a patient suffering from incurable and painful disease) is morally wrong and sinful before God	3.69	0.48	Agree
7	Both faiths teach that its adherent should be charitable, honest, just and have forgiving spirits	3.78	0.41	Agree
8	The basic aim of Islamic and Christianity morality and ethics is "to achieve the pleasure of God or to make God's pleasure the objective of man's life	3.19	0.52	Agree
9	Both Christianity and Islam belief the God's will is supreme and must be surrendered to by all believers as a sign of true worship	3.90	0.31	Agree
10	Islam and Christianity believe and teach that the reward and sincere worship of God is eternal happiness in Heaven and that adherents who fail to worship God in truth will be condemn to hell fire.	3.86	0,38	Agree

Field Work (2023)

Data analysis in Table 3 showed that ethically and morally, the Christians and Muslims have similar ideology. For instance the respondents generally agreed that both faiths teach that their adherents should be charitable, honest, just and have forgiving spirits.. Islam and Christianity teach that ethically and morally, a believer must be kind, honorable and humble to one's parents and both Christianity and Islam condemn adultery, murder and stealing . The result also showed that Christian ethics posits that active voluntary euthanasia (the painless killing of a patient suffering from incurable and painful disease) is morally wrong and sinful. Hence, it can be said that there are no basic differences between Christians and Muslims with respect to morals and ethics teaching adducing to the possibility of believing and worshiping same God.

Research Question 3

What is the general perception of Muslims and Christians concerning approaches to worshipping God?

Data analysis in Table 4 summarized the perceptions of both Muslims and Christians concerning the doctrines about the worship of God. The result clearly indicated the possibilities of unending controversies about beliefs and approaches to the worship of God by both Muslims and Christians. Both showed contradictions in some aspects of their worship. For instance, the teaching of Islam on the notion that "Jesus was condemned to crucifixion, but was miraculously saved from execution, and was raised to the heavens" was rejected by the Christianity who teaches that Jesus died on the cross of Calvary and resurrected on the third day for the redemption of mankind. Another teaching concerning the notion that "The creation of Jesus was similar to the creation of Adam" was upheld in Islam but was rejected in Christianity who teaches the divinity of Jesus. Also, while Christianity teaches the doctrine of Trinity, Islam teaches that "Trinity" is essentially polytheistic which is against monotheistic. Hence, the Muslims believe that Christians worship three Gods. The Muslims also generally believe that their religion uphold the truth while the Christians have twisted the knowledge of God. In all of these, there are clearly no indications to suggest that both faiths worship same God.

Table 3: Mean Responses of Christians and Muslims on belief and approaches to worshipping God

		Christianity			Islam		
	Perceptions of *Christians and Muslims on belief and approaches to worshipping God*	**(X)**	**S.D**	**Rmk**	**(X)**	**S.D**	**Rmk**
1	Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.	3.39	0.58	Agree	2.14	0.73	Disagree
2	Christianity teaches the concept of "Trinity" which is essentially polytheistic as against monotheistic	2.17	0.76	Disagree	3.46	0.62	Agree
3	The Muslims know the true God, but Christians have twisted the knowledge of God, worshiping a divine identity they created	2.15	0.72	Disagree	2.63	0.44	Agree
4	Christians are "*Infidel"*.(group whose religion is not that of the majority	2.09	0.75	Disagree	2.98	0.48	Agree
5	Christianity belief that "Jesus" is the Son of God whose coming as the Messiah was prophesized in the Hebrew Bible	3.40	0.58	Agree	2-11	0.70	Disagree
6	Christians as people of the Book, and Kafirs (unbelievers) committing Shirk (Polytheism) because of the doctrine of Trinity	2.00	0.83	Disagree	2.99	0.48	Agree

7	The majority of Christians view Islam as a false religion due to the fact that its adherents reject the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ	2.12	0.70	Disagree	3.00	0.47	Agree
8	Jesus is the incarnated Son of God, divine and sinless	3.00	0.49	Agree	2.10	0.69	Disagree
9	The creation of Jesus was similar to the creation of Adam	2.34	0.85	Disagree	3.01	0.49	Agree
10	According to Islam, Jesus was condemned to crucifixion, but was miraculously saved from execution, and was raised to the heavens	2.32	0.86	Disagree	3.38	0.58	Agree
11	Islam believes that instead of Jesus being crucified, His lookalike was actually crucified	2.13	0.68	Disagree	3.37	0.58	Agree

Field Work (2023)

Research Question 4

Do Christians and Muslims really worship the same God?

Table 5: Mean Responses of Respondents on Whether Muslims and Christians Worship same God

	Do Christians and Muslims really worship the same God?	X	S.D	Remark
1	The concepts of religions and God are one that have many meeting points and several controversies as there are many worshipers and believers with varying perceptions and believe	3.91	0.35	Agree
2	The question of whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God cannot be answered with an emphatic Yes or No response as any attempt to do that will violate the complexity of the matter the more	3.89	0.37	Agree
3	The answers to the question of whether Christians and Muslims worship same God is usually coloured by the preferences, presuppositions or ideological- doctrinal understanding of the individual	3.93	0.34	Agree
4	It is satanic to attempt to believe in the notion that Christians and Muslims are not worshipping same God as there is only one supernatural deity known as God both in Islam and Christianity.	4.00	0.29	Agree
5	Muslims and Christians only have differences in their conceptual understanding of one and supreme God	3.96	0.33	Agree
6	Rather than engage in endless arguments of whether Christians and Muslims worship same God, more time should be created to explore the understanding of God the more	3.88	0.37	Agree

7	God is immeasurable, so to define God in some particular way is impossible. Hence, since God is much greater than anything we can imagine no religious group can claim superiority in the conceptual understanding of God.	4.07	0.25	Agree

Field Work (2023)

Data presentation in Table 5 showed that both Muslims and Christians generally obliged to all the questionnaire items. The mean scores of above 2.5 in all the items indicated this position. The respondents generally agreed that the concept of religious and God is one that has many meeting points and several controversies as there are many worshipers and believers with varying perceptions and believe and that the answers to the question of whether Christians and Muslims worship same God is usually as a result of differences in the preferences, presuppositions or ideological- doctrinal understanding of the individual. The respondents also agreed that it is satanic to attempt to belief in the notion that Christians and Muslims are not worshipping same God as there is only one supernatural deity known as God both in Islam and Christianity. The respondents suggested that rather than engage in endless arguments of whether Christians and Muslims worship same God, more time should be created to explore the understanding of God the more. Lastly, both Christians and Muslims agreed that God is immeasurable, so to define God in some particular way is impossible. Hence, since God is much greater than anything we can imagine no religious group can claim superiority in the conceptual understanding of God.

Discussion of Findings

From the various findings there appeared to be no controversies between Muslims and Christians about their knowledge on the nature and concept of God as both faiths see and acknowledge God as omnipresent Spirit, the creator of all things and one who is responsible for the past, present and future existence of material objects and the laws that govern them. This finding corroborates the assertions of Luhman (2007); Armstrong (1994) and Marshall (2004) who have argued that the Christians and the Muslims have a unique meeting point concerning their philosophical views of God as both faiths generally accepted the teachings that God is All-powerful, Faithful, Holy, Just, Love, Merciful, Sovereign and knows everything.

The findings on ethics and morality showed that Christians and Muslims have similar ideologies especially concerning being charitable, honest, just and have forgiving spirits as true qualities of one worshiping God. Appiah-Sekyere & Ebo-Sarbah (2018) and Ayuba (2020) in their separate findings have shown that both Christianity and Islam uphold similar ideology concerning ethics and morality. These researchers believe that both Christians and Muslims ethics deal with what is morally right and wrong for a believer in God. Appiah-Sekyere & Ebo-Sarbah (2018) and Leaman (2009) also argued that the Christian's and Muslim's ethics & morality are enshrined in charity, forgiveness, honesty, patience, justice, respect for others and adhering to behaviours that are morally just and right while discarding those that are unjust and immoral in order to please God.

The findings on how Christians and Muslims perceive each other's methods, beliefs and mode of worshiping God revealed that a number of misconceptions and controversies which suggest that both faiths may not be worshiping the same God. The major areas of

misunderstanding include the doctrine of Trinity, Divinity of Jesus, Jesus as the son of God, Jesus' crucifixion, death and resurrecton and issues concerning the Antichrist as believed and taught in Christianity. The Muslims respondents clearly rejected the issues of Trinity, divinity of Jesus Christ, the crucifixion and death of Jesus, The doctrine of Jesus as the son of God, the emergence of the Antichrist while seeing these as false teachings. The Muslims reject these doctrines and hold firmly that there is only one supreme God and that Jesus is one of the Prophets sent by God and so cannot be the son of God. This is probably why an Islamic cleric named Ahmed Deedat in 2008 wrote a controversial book tittle "50,000 errors in the Bible" that many Christians will find intolerable.

Lastly, the findings on the question "Do Christians and Muslims really worship same God" revealed that Christians and Muslims generally agreed that rather than engage in endless arguments of whether Christians and Muslims worship same God, more time should be created to explore better understanding of God and that since God is immeasurable, defining Him in some particular ways will show a very shallow knowledge of God. Ibrahim (2014) have earlier argued that some fundamentalists among Christians and Muslims usually have their argument and perceptions based on personal preferences, presuppositions or theological-doctrinal understanding which does not necessarily stand for general opinions. Hence, the question of whether Muslims and Christians worship same God cannot be emphatically answered with a Yes or No answer as it requires logical reasoning. There is only one supreme and sovereign God and worshipers adopt different doctrinal views and understanding to do His will and achieve Him eternally.

Conclusion

The question of whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God cannot be answered with an emphatic Yes or No response as any attempt to do that will violate the complexity of the matter as both Christians and the Muslims have their bragging right on their belief, styles and mode of worshiping God. The concepts of religion and God have many meeting points and several controversies. Hence, many people and fundamentalists attempting to answer the question are doing so on the basis of their personal preferences, presuppositions or ideological- doctrinal understanding. God is immeasurable, so to define God in some particular ways is impossible. Hence, since God is much greater than anything we can imagine no religious group should claim superiority in the conceptual understanding of God and the question as to whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God is totally needless. Rather than engage in endless arguments of whether Christians and Muslims worship same God, Muslims and Christians especially in Nigeria should embrace each other and respect their different opinions and perceptions concerning the worshiping of God.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusion drawn, the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. One major factor in the cause of the rift between Christians and Muslims is politics. Politics has played prominent roles in creating a dichotomy between Christians and Muslims especially in Nigeria. Hence, religious leaders of both faiths should embrace dialogue and peaceful coexistence tolerating each other rather than engage in unnecessary religious riot and confrontations.

2. It is arguable to believe that Christians and Muslims are not worshipping same God as there is only one supernatural deity known as God both in Islam and Christianity.
3. Some Islamic scholars should swallow their pride and stop delving into aspects of Christian theology where they do not have perfect understanding. For instance the Islamic scholars who wrote the book "50,000 Errors in the Bible" and "Reasons Why the Bible is not the word of God" exposed nothing but their ignorance of the real concept of Christianity. Such books are needless and could be more provocative. Similarly, Christian scholars should stop provocative arguments and adopt dialogue to resolving controversial issues.
4. Both Islam and Christianity should not allow politics to direct the affairs of worship of God and service to humanity especially in multi-religious states like Nigeria.

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